

**Groundbreaking Evening of Programming
on Wednesday, January 21 at 9:00 p.m. (ET)
Drives Major PBS Initiative on Alzheimer's Disease**

***THE FORGETTING: A PORTRAIT OF ALZHEIMER'S*
Takes an Urgent Look at a Growing Epidemic and its
Devastating Effects on Patients, Families and Society**

***ALZHEIMER'S: THE HELP YOU NEED (working title)*
with Award-Winning Actor David Hyde Pierce
Provides Critical Information on Where to Get Answers and Support**

Innovative Web Site Developed In Conjunction with MIT Media Lab

**Public Television Stations and Leading Support Organizations Mobilized
to Extend the Impact of this Television Event**

"She has a lot less words now. You can almost see her brain shut down. People ask me, 'And so, how is your sister?' And I think 'What am I going to tell you?' She's losing her mind."

Julie Lawson's sister Fran Noonan Powers has Alzheimer's disease. And like tens of millions of Americans who have a loved one with this ruthless illness, Julie is scared, frustrated and searching for answers. Today, approximately five million Americans have this devastating disease. But the baby boomer generation may be a ticking time bomb. With each passing year, as the first boomers approach the age of 65, America moves closer to the brink of an epidemic. While recent advances in medical research show exciting progress, effective therapies to combat the disease are still out of reach.

On **Wednesday, January 21 at 9:00 p.m. (ET)**, PBS will present a **groundbreaking evening of programming** that will bring this looming health crisis to national attention – offering insight, context, help and hope.

The evening begins with ***THE FORGETTING: A Portrait of Alzheimer's***, a 90-minute documentary that explores this frightening disease, the human toll it takes on patients and caregivers, and the latest research in the race to find a cure.

Hosted by award-winning actor David Hyde Pierce, ***ALZHEIMER'S: The Help You Need***, a half-hour follow-up special, will bring together a panel of experts to provide authoritative answers to commonly-asked questions and direct viewers to organizations and resources that can offer help and support. Hyde Pierce, who watched both his grandfather and his father suffer with Alzheimer's, knows first hand the challenges of dealing with the disease and the sense of personal vulnerability. "With each year that passes, my fear grows - my fear that the disease process that destroyed their memories, and ultimately their lives, has begun developing in my own brain. My fear grows not just for myself, but also for my generation - the 14 million baby boomers who will get Alzheimer's disease if we don't find a way to beat this dreadful disease."

THE FORGETTING: A Portrait of Alzheimer's and its accompanying nationwide outreach campaign mark the first major PBS initiative on Alzheimer's disease. The landmark program, produced and directed by Elizabeth Arledge, was based on the best-selling book *The Forgetting — Alzheimer's: Portrait of an Epidemic*, by David Shenk, who served as a consultant to the documentary and appears in it.

MetLife and MetLife Foundation have been longtime supporters of both public broadcasting and Alzheimer's disease research. MetLife Foundation is the exclusive underwriter of the documentary, the national follow-up program and the companion Web site. Major funding for the national outreach campaign is provided by MetLife Foundation, with additional support by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"Alzheimer's affects everyone. As I speak with audiences around the country I find that there is usually only one degree of separation between every person in the room and an Alzheimer's patient. This is a disease that simply cannot be ignored," says Naomi Boak, Executive Producer of ***THE FORGETTING***. "We need to attack this problem on many levels, and this project is designed to do just that through an evening of high-visibility programming, a comprehensive Web site, and scores of public television stations working with national partner organizations to reach out to their communities. With this multi-faceted initiative, generously sponsored by MetLife Foundation, we will provide information, support and, most of all, hope."

Death By A Thousand Subtractions

The first signs can be subtle and disconcerting. Isabel McKenna had always been a strong and vital woman, full of life and fun. And then her family started to notice a change. She lost weight and looked tired all the time. She started getting up in the middle of night and dressing for work as if it were morning. She'd lose track of simple

things she was doing. She'd make toast and when the bread came out of the toaster and she'd put it right back in. In 1990, Isabel was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and it has been a long journey since for her husband, Thomas, and their four daughters. For the last 13 years, they have been ground down by Isabel's illness. "I really see this as torture," says her daughter Maureen in **THE FORGETTING**. "I really see this as somebody who is trapped and I feel helpless about what we can do."

While the McKennas' story might sound like a rare and awful nightmare, it is unfortunately, all too common. "This is depressingly typical" says Dr. John Growdon, Isabel McKenna's physician. "It's almost a stereotype pattern."

Isabel McKenna is one of nearly five million Americans with Alzheimer's – ten times as many as there were only 15 years ago. The disease, which today is the leading cause of dementia and memory loss in older people, already costs the United States over \$100 billion annually. "But," says David Shenk, "that is going to be dwarfed when the baby boomers start to turn 65."

In examining this looming social and economic crisis, **THE FORGETTING** focuses in on stories of families whose lives have been steadily ravaged by Alzheimer's. "Like so many coping with this tragedy, the families who share their stories in **THE FORGETTING** all have one major motivation in common – they want to let other people facing similar situations know that they are not alone, that there is help, and that they too can find the strength to face a tragedy like Alzheimer's with dignity and grace," says award-winning producer and director Elizabeth Arledge. "These families are drawing on reservoirs of strength and compassion to stay focused on seeing the person they love instead of the symptoms of the disease," says Arledge.

Gladys and Harry Fuget have been married for 45 years. At the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Steven DeKosky conducts diagnostic tests that reveal that Gladys' disease is still moderate and she is not yet seriously impaired. But with each day, she is less able to keep things in her memory, even for short periods of time. "The disease is robbing us of what little time that remains," says Harry, "and it looks bleak and frightening ahead."

In another case, Reda Scully comes to DeKosky's clinic for testing to determine if her memory lapses are normal aging or Alzheimer's. The bad news comes back that she probably has early, mild Alzheimer's. There is no cure and no way to predict how the disease will progress. She will be monitored and take medications that hopefully will slow the progression. She is thankful she has her son to take care of her.

And she may need quite a great deal of care over a long period of time. As the disease spreads, the brain begins to shrink, personality changes and long-term memories eventually disappear. In the late stages speech becomes impossible. Then, finally, the parts of the brain that control basic functions like breathing and swallowing shut down. The time between diagnosis and death can be anywhere from eight to 20 years.

But Reda's son will also suffer the effects of the disease. As ***THE FORGETTING*** shows, the caretakers of Alzheimer's patients are themselves often trapped by loneliness, stress and depression as they struggle to face the challenges of their responsibilities.

Those who are related to an Alzheimer's patient also often wrestle with the fear that they may be genetically predisposed to get the disease themselves. For a small number of the children of Alzheimer's victims, this fear is a reality. And when this genetically-linked strain of the disease occurs it threatens all the siblings, like the ten children of Julia Noonan. Julie Lawson remembers the onset of her mother Julia's Alzheimer's disease. "People were wondering if she was having a nervous breakdown," Julie recalls. "A doctor finally diagnosed it and we had no comprehension of what Alzheimer's was, none." When her mother finally died of pneumonia, Julie felt relieved that their ordeal was over. "I almost felt like we're done. Okay we're done. We don't have to do this again. And then Fran came down with it and that's when we realized we're not done. That's when I realized the magnitude of this disease. This is going to hit us again."

Targeting the "Invisible Enemy"

Using special animations to reveal the complex workings of the brain, ***THE FORGETTING*** helps viewers understand how Alzheimer's begins, how it does its damage, and what kinds of techniques medical researchers are using to arrive at a way of conquering it. And by following the scientific adventure story as leading scientists search for answers to Alzheimer's mysteries, ***THE FORGETTING*** offers a fascinating insider's glimpse of the latest theories about the disease and what potential treatments are in the pipeline.

While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's, researchers at many labs around the country are searching for ways to slow the progression of the disease. Some of the most promising research has been focusing on plaque deposits in the brain that seem to form long before there is any noticeable forgetting. But being able to see these plaques

inside living brains has eluded the grasp of scientists for over a century, leaving no way to gauge the impact of potential drug therapies short of waiting to observe the effects on patients' behavior. This could take years.

In what may be a key breakthrough, DeKosky's team at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center has developed a staining compound called the Pittsburgh Compound that allows scientists see Alzheimer's plaques in living brain tissue without harming the patient. This vital research tool will enable scientists to monitor the impact of drugs designed to attack the plaques. Working in collaboration with radiologists at the Alzheimer's Disease Research Lab at Massachusetts General Hospital, the two teams have been able use the Pittsburgh Compound to look deep inside the living brain tissue of research mice. In an extremely hopeful moment, ***THE FORGETTING*** is with the scientists as they begin their first human tests in the U.S. – tests that show the Pittsburgh Compound to be a promising leap forward in Alzheimer's research.

Scientific progress, however, is unlikely to help Gladys Fuget, whose disease is advancing steadily. But, for the Noonan siblings and their children the research could prove to be the difference between growing old with grace or losing their minds – and eventually their lives – to Alzheimer's.

Half An Hour Dedicated to Answering Key Questions

The PBS broadcast of ***THE FORGETTING*** will be followed by a half-hour program that will put key Alzheimer's issues in context, offer answers to commonly asked questions and suggest resources for finding more information.

The program will be hosted by Emmy Award-winning actor David Hyde Pierce, best-known for his role as Niles Crane in the NBC comedy *Frasier*. Having experienced the ravages of Alzheimer's first-hand – through both his grandfather's and his father's illnesses – Hyde Pierce has been a tireless advocate in the fight to find a cure. Like millions of others, he saw the exhausting emotional, physical and financial impact Alzheimer's has on both patients and their families.

In this half-hour discussion, Hyde Pierce will speak with leading researchers, social workers, family members from ***THE FORGETTING***, and others. They will discuss such topics as: when to go for testing; how to live with dignity and sanity; how to plan ahead; and where to go for more information and support.

National Outreach Campaign

The PBS broadcast of ***THE FORGETTING*** will be extended by a national outreach campaign. Local PBS stations will host a wide variety of outreach and

educational events around the broadcast, enriched and supported by a range of national organizations, including the Alzheimer's Association, the National Institute on Aging's Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center, AARP, Administration on Aging, Faith in Action, Delta Society and Last Acts.

A downloadable Viewer's Guide will provide practical information and answers to common questions.

Innovative Web Site

A groundbreaking Web site accessible at www.pbs.org/theforgetting will be a central hub for Alzheimer's information and support, providing advice, resources and opportunities for Alzheimer's families to share emotions and insights. The site – unlike any other existing Web site – will help the public understand Alzheimer's by weaving together personal stories, science and history. Through interactive features, the site will give visitors insight into such topics as: What is it like to have Alzheimer's? What's normal and what's not? Who's at risk? How do we live well with Alzheimer's?

Created by the MIT Media Lab, The Living Center section of the Web site is an online destination that can help relieve the stress of visiting with an Alzheimer's patient by providing stimulating and engaging activities that Alzheimer's patients will enjoy.

Credits

MetLife Foundation is the exclusive funder of ***THE FORGETTING: A Portrait of Alzheimer's***. Major funding for the national outreach campaign is provided by MetLife Foundation, with additional support by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. MetLife Foundation, established in 1976 by MetLife, supports health, education, civic and cultural programs throughout the United States.

THE FORGETTING: Portrait of Alzheimer's is produced by Twin Cities Public Television. Executive Producer: Naomi S. Boak; Producer and Director: Elizabeth Arledge; Editor: Doug Quade; Original Music: Mason Daring; Executive in Charge: Gerald Richman.

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Contacts:

Karen Salerno
Kelly & Salerno Communications
203-863-1002
karen@kellysalerno.com

Olivia Dupuis
Kelly & Salerno Communications
203-863-1006
olivia@kellysalerno.com